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**ABSTRACT**

To help school boards exercise better policy control over the instructional program, researchers reviewed the literature and surveyed board members to determine how much influence boards should have over curriculum, how much influence they do have, and how much they want to have. After briefly tracing the history of board involvement, the literature review summarizes current opinion on the board's role, finding that most writers feel school boards are not involved enough in the instructional program. The authors list recommendations found in the literature of ways that boards can become more involved in curriculum. The recommendations cover four facets of the instructional program: the social, involving curriculum content; the institutional, regarding curriculum implementation; the instructional, involving teacher selection and evaluation; and the personal experience facet, concerning evaluation of student learning. The authors then report on their national questionnaire survey of 810 board members on what boards are actually doing regarding curriculum matters. They compare their results with the literature's recommendations, particularly in the areas of community desires, district needs, policy establishment, administrative reports, teacher and curriculum evaluation, and communication with the public. Appendices provide the survey questionnaire and reprints of two articles on boards' roles in curriculum development. (RW)

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## Research Report 1981-2

### The School Board and the Instructional Program

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# **The School Board and the Instructional Program**

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## **NSBA Research Report 1981-2 The School Board and the Instructional Program**

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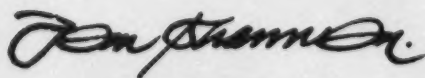
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## Foreword

What constitutes the ideal role for school boards to play in their districts' instructional programs is often unclear. Sometimes boards play too minor a part in developing and evaluating the instructional program, thereby eliminating the lay governors' perspective from the process of formulating curriculum. Other times, boards become too involved in managing the details of the instructional program, thereby doing the work that should be done by superintendents and other local education administrators under a board's general policy supervision. As a result, board members are sometimes unsure of where to draw the line between too little and too much participation in overseeing the instructional program to ensure that students are receiving the best possible education.

*The School Board and the Instructional Program* addresses the issue of what school boards are and could be doing to monitor and improve the instructional program. We do not claim to have all the answers. We hope, though, that the information and ideas presented in the report will motivate readers to evaluate their board's role in the instructional program and determine the best way their board can exercise policy control over the curriculum at the local level as the law clearly contemplates.



Thomas A. Shannon  
Executive Director  
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# Introduction

What touches every student, parent, teacher, administrator, and school board member in a district? What has the potential to produce a well-educated citizenry who will contribute significantly locally, nationally, and globally? What is often discussed, disputed, criticized, or ignored? The answer to all these questions is the same: the instructional program.

The structure and content of a school district's instructional program—the very basis of the entire school program—is influenced by many groups: school boards, administrators, textbook companies, developers of standardized tests, and lobbying groups. Depending on the time, place, situation, and people involved, the amount of influence a particular group has will vary.

This research report is primarily concerned with the role school boards play in influencing the instructional program. More specifically, the report's focus is on how much influence school boards actually have, how much they want to have, and how much writers in the field of education say they should have on developing and evaluating the instructional program. In addition, the report addresses what actions boards can take—if they so desire—to become more involved in planning and monitoring the instructional program. Throughout the report, the phrase "instructional program" refers to an outline of the procedures, concerns, and subjects offered by a school over a period of time.

To determine how much influence school boards have and would like to have, NSBA mailed a six-page questionnaire in April 1981 to 3,000 school board members across the country. Completed questionnaires were returned by 810 board members, constituting a 27 percent response rate. The largest number of responses came from small towns (34 percent) and sub-urban districts (31 percent). Rural districts were represented by 24 percent of the respondents, and urban areas by 7 percent of the

respondents. (Four percent of the respondents did not indicate what kind of district they represented.)

The majority of respondents came from districts with student enrollments of less than 10,000: 45 percent of the represented districts have enrollments under 2,500, and 38 percent have enrollments between 2,500 and 9,999. Ten percent of the represented districts have enrollments between 10,000 and 24,000; 5 percent have enrollments over 25,000.

Nearly half of the represented districts (49 percent) have decreasing student enrollments; 11 percent have increasing enrollments; 26 percent have stable enrollments. (Fourteen percent of the respondents did not indicate whether their districts' enrollments were increasing, decreasing, or stable.)

The report is divided into two major sections. The first is a review of current literature on the school board's role in the development and evaluation of the instructional program. Contemporary writers in the field of education as well as recent NSBA task force studies and speeches on the instructional program are cited. The second part of the report is an analysis of the results of the April 1981 NSBA survey. Comparisons are made between what contemporary educators and writers believe a school board should be doing and what school board members themselves say they should be doing.

Three appendixes supplement the report. The first (Appendix A) is an article that contains a quiz to determine how much the reader knows about a school board's responsibilities in developing an instructional program. The second (Appendix B) is a model policy that boards can use as a guideline for developing policies about board involvement in the instructional program. The third (Appendix C) is a copy of the NSBA questionnaire.

# Review of the Literature

## A brief history

Where do a school board's responsibilities stop and an administrative staff's begin? This question has been debated at least since the late 1800s when many superintendents argued that administrators—not boards of education—should control the schools, even though the boards would retain final authority.

In *Understanding School Boards*,<sup>1</sup> Raymond Callahan traces the path American public education has taken from its beginnings to the mid-1900s, observing that the roles of school boards and superintendents have changed regarding control of public schools. Initially in American education, school boards operated (i.e., fully controlled) the schools. Local control of education—a uniquely American tradition—dates to the days of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. In 1647, local officials were elected to manage the public schools by serving on school committees. These officials formed autonomous committees, not controlled by the local government. By 1789, the Massachusetts legislature passed an education act directing every town in the state to employ a special committee to look after the schools. When Boston expanded the law by mandating that each ward establish a school committee, the foundation for future public school systems was laid. School boards ran the schools. They hired teachers, tested students annually, and kept a close watch on building maintenance.

Callahan notes that as town populations grew and school enrollments increased dramatically, school boards found it difficult to keep a tight rein on the schools. Although the number of members per board increased, the volunteer, part-time committees could not effectively man-

age the ever-increasing student enrollments. To relieve the board members of some of their administrative responsibilities, Horace Mann and Samuel Gridley Howe (nineteenth century education reformers) proposed that a new official office be created. As a result, in 1851 in Boston—after a storm of controversy—the first permanent, full-time superintendent of schools was appointed. By 1876, approximately 80 percent of the cities with populations of 8,000 or more had established the office of superintendent.<sup>2</sup>

Although most school systems employed a board-appointed superintendent, many school boards were reluctant to yield any of their power to the appointed administrators. Callahan reports that because superintendents believed they had titles but no real authority, they became dissatisfied with the arrangement. By the 1890s, superintendents and school boards waged verbal and written battles in many areas across the country.

Even before the twentieth century, superintendents contended that they were better able than school boards to tend to the day-to-day operations of the schools because they were more familiar than board members with the technical details of running a school system. Superintendents and their supporters also argued (in statements echoed today) that the boards were too large, were involved in partisan politics, sometimes used the schools for their own selfish or political gains, and erroneously thought of themselves as educators. Some superintendents believed their power should be achieved through the passage of laws while others said school boards on their own should delegate more responsibility and author-

ity to administrators. Although superintendents made some headway by the end of 1895, they realized that, for the most part, they had not gained as much as they had wanted. In many districts where the efforts of superintendents failed, the superintendents lost their jobs.

By the late 1800s, educational administrators realized it would be more advantageous to try to reason with and persuade school boards rather than to attack the school board collectively or board members as individuals.

During the early decades of the twentieth century, the relationship between administrators and boards of education was influenced by the writings of Elwood P. Cubberly (*Public School Administration*, published in 1916) and George Strayer (*The Structure and Administration of Education in American Democracy*, published in 1938). The basic tenets of the two textbooks on school administration held that school boards should be reduced in size to between five and seven members, that board members should be elected at large rather than from their wards so they would represent all people within the district, and that they should perform their duties without pay. The responsibilities of a school board, the authors maintained, should include selecting school sites, appointing superintendents, managing the budget, and determining policies within the districts. In short, school boards should act as legislative bodies while the actual operations of the schools should be turned over to the superintendent and staff. Boards should set policy while administrators should concentrate on the detailed management of the schools.

### Contemporary opinion

In this final quarter of the twentieth century, almost every textbook on school administration or school boards devotes attention to school board/superintendent relations for the purposes of improving the working relationships of the two groups. State and national organizations sponsor workshops and seminars to help each group understand the needs and goals of the other. A clear division of responsibilities for the instructional program, however, has yet to be established.

A review of the current literature on the school board's role in the instructional program shows that representatives of school boards and concerned citizens groups believe their districts' schools are not doing enough for the students. This discontent is directed not only toward administrators or teachers. Rather, articles are being written about school boards' neglect of some of their responsibilities for developing and monitoring sound instructional programs. It seems the pendulum has swung from the viewpoint, in the late 1800s, that school boards were too involved in curriculum matters to the opinion, in the late 1900s, that boards are not involved enough in these matters.

Contemporary writers maintain that boards of education should not only prescribe what goes on in the schools but also they should be actively involved in confirming that policies are followed and goals are met. Most of today's writers in the field of education believe that, in order for school boards to provide the best possible school program in their districts, board members must devote more of their time and energy to monitoring the instructional program. The general opinion is that school boards must pay more attention to what is being taught, by whom, how, and with what results in their districts even though actual administrative duties would still remain in the domain of superintendents.

Evidence of this prevailing opinion was noted at the 1979 meeting of the NSBA Task Force on "Elementary and Secondary Curriculum: What Decisions Should Boards Be Making?" The Task Force members concluded that school boards should become more assertive in fulfilling their crucial leadership role in curriculum issues. The Task Force stressed that a board's responsibilities are ongoing; therefore, boards need to exhibit leadership and involvement constantly and consistently to ensure that the district's instructional program evolves by design, not by accident.<sup>3</sup>

One writer who agrees that boards need to shape the instructional program states that, as it is now, "most boards do not deal with curriculum in any systematic way or in any manner except through periodic reviews of various

courses or subject areas."<sup>4</sup> He believes that, in general, current boards' activities regarding the instructional program are insufficient because "a board must not only be concerned with *what* is taught and learned, but *why*." Without knowing "why," the board loses its control over the contents of the instructional program. The control is passed to the administrative staff or the test makers and the board no longer makes decisions but merely ratifies someone else's decisions. This transfer not only places undue pressure on administrators, the writer says, but it also deprives the public of its legal right to hold school boards responsible for what is happening in the public schools.

Another strong believer in the necessity for school boards to demonstrate stronger leadership in the instructional program maintains that the highest priority of school boards should be monitoring the instructional program.<sup>5</sup> He argues that school boards, not administrators, have the ultimate responsibility for establishing educational goals and assuring that those goals are met. He claims that many school boards have given too much authority and responsibility for the instructional program to administrators, and in doing so, "have abrogated responsibility for providing purpose and direction to education."

Control of the instructional program by school boards is the very basis for a locally controlled public education system, according to another contemporary writer in the field of education.<sup>6</sup> When board members were asked by this writer why they ran for office, they usually answered that they wanted to improve the quality of education in their districts. In order to accomplish their mission, board members must become involved in curriculum matters.

What has kept board members from fulfilling their curriculum responsibilities in the past? A 1979 NSBA Task Force attempted to solve the riddle by discussing the various obstacles to school board involvement in shaping the instructional program. The following list of impediments is a result of the committee's deliberations:

- State and federal mandates and judicial orders that predetermine curriculum and

- related areas (e.g., graduation requirements);
- Lack of goals or failure to address formally what the district's educational program is really designed to accomplish;
- Lack of a plan, system, or procedure through which the board can address curriculum issues;
- Lack of effective evaluation plans for assessing the success of the educational program;
- Uninformed board members (both those who are "involuntarily uninformed" because they are unaware of their role or timid about asserting themselves, and those who are "voluntarily uninformed" because they maintain narrow perspectives and refuse to learn);
- Obstruction by administration and/or staff;
- Conflicting attitudes of parents and other outside groups;
- Pressures of textbook companies to purchase instructional materials that dictate the curriculum in ways which do not complement district philosophies and goals;
- A divided board or board members who "play" politics;
- A constantly changing board that impedes continuity;
- A variety of "power" struggles (e.g., teachers and other staff fighting to take over the board's roles);
- Budget restrictions;
- Changing role of the family, which increases the scope of the school board's responsibilities;
- Time spent serving the needs of non-English-speaking students, handicapped students, and students with exceptional needs;
- The need to deal with other issues such as drug or alcohol abuse and serious problems with student discipline.<sup>7</sup>

## What boards can do

Several writers have addressed ways that school boards can become more involved in the instructional program and have prescribed steps for boards to take and pertinent questions for boards to ask. The writers suggest actions which, if followed, will help school boards assume responsibility for instructional programs with precision and thoroughness.

A school district's instructional program may be thought of as having four basic facets: *social*, *institutional*, *instructional*, and *personal*

experience.<sup>8</sup> School boards are involved to the greatest extent in the social facet; administrators in the institutional facet; teachers in the instructional facet; and students in the personal experience facet. School boards, however, can provide leadership in all four areas by asking the right questions and working closely with the other groups to ensure that the community's educational goals are being fulfilled.

### The social facet

Of the four basic areas, school boards are most actively involved in the social facet of the instructional program—that is, deciding what should be taught in the schools and why. The social facet is also the area in which most people believe it is appropriate for boards to take a visible leadership role. Current spokesmen in the field of education agree that there are certain steps school boards should take to fulfill their responsibilities in the social area.

The first step is to find out what the community wants its school system to provide. This step usually involves conducting a needs assessment of the community and inviting parents, students, teachers, administrators, and other interested citizens to attend board meetings to express their ideas, opinions, and needs. Many valuable resource persons can be found who will assist in the planning and improvement of the district's instructional program. The school board should let the public know it is taking an in-depth look at the curriculum to assure quality education in the district and that public and administrative staff participation is welcomed; however, the board should also make it clear to everyone involved that final decisions about the instructional program will be made by the school board.

By talking with members of the community, boards can more easily tailor the instructional program to fit what the public wants its schools to be teaching. Of course, boards cannot develop educational goals and objectives based solely on the desires of the community because goals set by the state board of education and the federal government must also be met. Nonetheless, an understanding of local needs allows

a board to incorporate its district's needs as well as state and federal mandates into a well-balanced school program. Questions and answers in the dialogues between school board members and community members should be neither abstract nor philosophical. On the contrary, they should be pragmatic discussions of what knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values the district wants its students to acquire and exhibit. Some questions boards might consider asking their constituents are:

- What knowledge, skills, and attitudes will our students need to have to be productive, contributing members of the community, nation, and world in 10, 15, and 20 years?
- What knowledge, skills, and attitudes do we want our students to have toward adults, elderly people, various nationalities and racial groups, each other, and themselves?
- What knowledge, skills, and attitudes do we want our students to have about work, leisure time, and our social institutions?<sup>9</sup>

The second step for boards to take in the social facet of the instructional program, according to contemporary education writers, is to develop a written statement of the district's educational philosophy and goals. If the results of the needs assessment and discussions with members of the community have been taken into consideration, the goals will reflect the combined interests and desires of the whole district. The board should take a firm stand on the goals and make them public knowledge so that everyone will know what to expect from the schools.

After the broad educational goals have been written, it is the board's responsibility to determine which needs the school system will address, what will be taught to meet those needs, what will be emphasized, and what sequences will be followed. Those determinations should be written as well-defined, specific objectives so that administrators and teachers will know how to set their priorities and so that the instructional program will be easier to evaluate.<sup>10</sup>

The next step is to establish policies to achieve the objective. When developing the policies, boards should consider four important questions:

- What are the educational purposes to be achieved?
- What educational experiences are appropriate to achieve the purposes?
- How should the experiences be organized for optimum learning?
- How can we evaluate whether the purposes have been achieved?<sup>11</sup>

One area to consider when establishing policies is the learning style of the students. Current theories of learning suggest that different individuals learn best when different modes of teaching are employed. For example, some students can learn new material by merely *listening* to what the teacher is saying; others, however, find it difficult to digest new information without seeing it in some way. Furthermore, various schools of thought exist on how to teach children to read, calculate, and become fluent in foreign languages. And, of course, gifted students, handicapped students, and students with learning disabilities require special instructional resources and programs.

To acquire a better understanding of the different learning styles and individual learning needs of students, school boards should encourage in-service training for teachers, administrators, and school board members. Local education leaders need to expand continually their knowledge of alternative instructional programs in order to improve their district's programs and provide the most effective instruction to their students. A commitment to in-service training usually requires a commitment of time and money to attend local, state, and national workshops.

By finding answers to the following questions about learning styles, boards will be taking concrete steps toward improving their districts' instructional programs:

- Are we creating dropouts because the program is not sensitive to learning differences?
- Do we need a wider variety of techniques designed to meet the differences among students?
- What kinds of teachers are best for what kinds of students?<sup>12</sup>

Other areas to consider are the values and morals the public considers important enough to emphasize in the classrooms. Issues such as textbook censorship, religion in the schools, sex education, creation versus evolution, and different theories of government should be thoroughly examined and discussed with a variety of community members to determine the make-up of the instructional program. Some questions boards may ask are:

- What should the schools teach?
- What should the schools not teach?<sup>13</sup>

### The institutional facet

In the institutional facet of the instructional program, administrators and curriculum specialists are the chief actors. They are responsible for deciding how the objectives of the district will be met in each grade in each school. Even though the district's professional educators will develop the specifics of the instructional program, school boards can become involved and show their concern in several ways.

For example, school boards can demonstrate their interest in what administrators are doing by requesting written reports from the superintendents. If boards are periodically briefed on administrative activities, board members will be in a better position to make subsequent decisions about their districts' educational programs. The reports, however, should not be reviewed by just the board chairman. If the reports are presented and discussed in detail at board meetings, everyone on the board as well as any visitors at the meeting will be kept abreast of what is happening in the schools.

Another way a board can influence the superintendent's work is by formulating policies that provide guidelines for the administrative staff. For instance, the school board can establish a policy that requires written district and building instructional plans. Another policy may require an articulated learning program between and within buildings.

### The instructional facet

The instructional facet is the area in which the learning program is further defined. In this area, teachers play the major role. They write lesson plans, evaluate students, and decide how to meet the goals and objectives laid out by the school board and the administrative staff. School boards can become involved at this stage primarily by assuring that qualified teachers are hired and by evaluating teachers to make sure they are performing up to the district's standards.

Education writers have offered suggestions on ways to avoid hiring incompetent teachers and ways to deal with incompetent teachers who are already employed by the school system.<sup>14</sup> One way to determine whether applicants will become successful teachers is to screen them prior to employment. One method of screening is to require each teacher applicant to submit a 250-word essay in his or her own handwriting. From this writing sample, skills in grammar, spelling, and organized thinking will be relatively easy to determine. Another screening technique is to give each applicant a test in his or her subject area (e.g., English, mathematics, social studies). If the tests are reliable and valid, they can be used as one means of comparing "teacher readiness" among applicants.

To determine whether teachers who are already employed by the school system are competent, two alternatives are suggested. First, minimum competency tests could be administered to all teachers in the district. If scores on the tests indicate that the teachers' skills need to be sharpened, in-service instruction could be provided at the school board's expense. A second alternative is to require all teachers to pass a course in reading before they become eligible to receive pay raises. It is best for teacher/board relations if teachers are involved in the decision-making process.

Efforts to improve teacher competence are being made in Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D.C., to name but a few places. "The public has an absolute right to demand teacher competence, and school boards have a legal and moral obligation to provide it," one writer believes.<sup>15</sup>

Either the school board or the administrative staff may conduct teacher evaluations. If the administrative staff is responsible for teacher evaluation, educators believe the board should make sure administrators know which teacher skills and qualities are important to the district. One suggested aspect of the evaluation process is classroom observations by school board members as well as by administrators. Because observations tend to be subjective, it is important for as many members of the board as possible to visit classrooms to see for themselves what is happening in their schools. Based on observations and evaluations, the board or staff may recommend in-service courses for teachers.

### The personal experience facet

The fourth facet to be considered in the instructional program is personal experience, that is, what the students actually learn. In this area, students are the key people, but this facet provides an opportunity to evaluate the instructional program to determine what is working well, what can be improved, and what should be discarded. A school board actively involved in its instructional program considers program evaluation a formative as well as a summative process. Answers to the following questions will help boards judge whether their public schools are meeting the standards set by the community, the board of education, the administrators, and the teachers:

- Are the students learning what we intended for them to learn?
- What are the students learning that we did not intend for them to learn?
- What is actually happening in the classrooms?
- Are we employing the right teachers for our students?
- How are our graduates doing in college, in work, as family members, as community members?
- What is the attitude of the parents and community members about our graduates?
- What do the students say about the learning program?
- Is our learning program cost effective?
- Which of the school board's policies need to be altered to help improve the learning program?

- Are the school board's policies implemented according to their intent?<sup>16</sup>

In order to answer the above questions, boards must be committed to delivering a first-rate instructional program to their students. Conducting the research and investigation necessary to secure a meaningful evaluation requires adequate time: time spent discussing the instructional program at board meetings; time spent seeking suggestions from parents, students, teachers, and administrators; time spent periodically reviewing and revising district policies; and time spent keeping informed about what happens to the district's students after they have graduated from the public schools.

After an evaluation has been conducted, it is the board's responsibility to alter the school program so that gaps between "what is" and "what should be" are diminished or eliminated. To carry out this responsibility effectively, boards need to be aware of alternative methods of meeting the priorities of the district. With such knowledge in hand, boards will be able to determine what resources and programs will best meet the community's needs at the best cost. Because many board members are not experts on alternative methods of instruction, they are encouraged to seek advice from the superintendent, the administrative staff, curriculum specialists, and teachers.

Finally, school boards are urged to inform their publics about what is being done to provide students in the district with the best possible education. School boards should try to establish an atmosphere of trust to make members of the community feel comfortable coming to the board with suggestions and appraisals. Such interaction not only helps the board find out what the district wants, but it also serves to cement a

good working relationship among community members and school board members.

In short, contemporary opinion on the role school boards should play in developing and improving instructional programs holds that boards should be greatly involved in monitoring the program, but should strongly consider advice from administrators, staff, and community members. In this way, boards will be able to assume the duties they were elected to perform without usurping any of the powers or responsibilities of administrators in the district.

On the basis of this review of the literature, current writers in the field of education generally agree that school boards are responsible for taking the initiative in the following activities:

- Finding out what the community wants;
- Determining which needs the school system will address, what will be taught to meet those needs, what will be stressed, and what sequences will be followed;
- Establishing policies that will help achieve district objectives;
- Becoming informed about the instructional program by requesting reports from the superintendent and administrative staff and by going through in-service training;
- Assuring that qualified teachers are hired and evaluating teachers to make sure they are performing up to the district's standards;
- Evaluating the instructional program and altering it so that gaps between "what is" and "what should be" are diminished or eliminated.
- Informing the public about what the school board is doing to improve the instructional program.

In the next chapter, comparisons are made between what writers are recommending that boards do, and what boards are actually doing, and what boards believe they should be doing.

## Results of the NSBA Survey

One of the purposes of the 1981 NSBA survey on the school board and the instructional program was to determine the extent to which school boards are following the advice of contemporary writers in the field of education concerning board involvement in the instructional program. A related purpose was to discover whether board members agree with published contemporary opinion. From the results, it appears that school boards are making—or would like to make—a concerted effort to become more involved in developing and monitoring their districts' instructional programs.

The following analysis is based on the responses of 810 board members across the country to a six-page questionnaire that was mailed in April 1981. As the introduction to this report states, the most substantial representation came from small towns and suburban districts with student populations of 10,000 or less.

### Finding out what the community wants

#### Community participation at board meetings

Much has been written about how valuable advice from the community can be to school boards when designing, reviewing, or revising the educational program. In practice, however, community participation is not so widespread. Approximately half of the respondents to the NSBA survey said special-interest groups—such as teachers, students, and other members of the community—rarely or never participate in discussions about the instructional program at board meetings. Rural districts elicit the fewest suggestions from members of the community at board meetings whereas urban districts elicit the most responses, perhaps because there are more people in urban districts and, therefore, a wider variety of opinions are expressed.

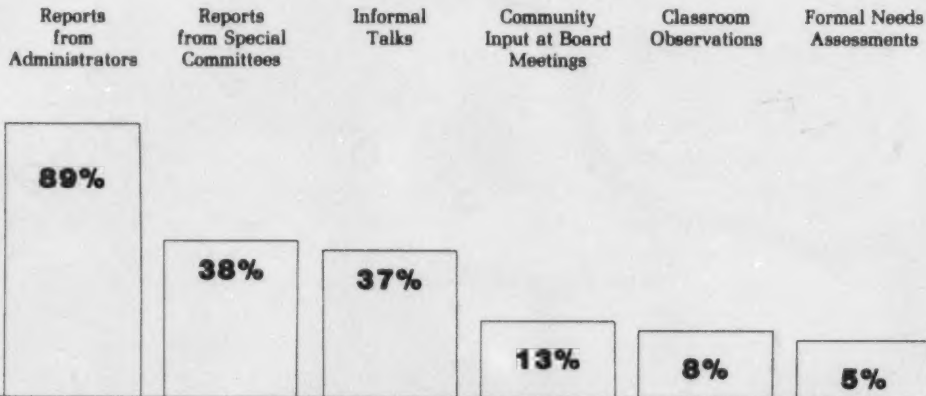
The greatest amount of community participation at board meetings occurs in districts with goal-oriented, written definitions of what constitutes a balanced instructional program. Respondents from these districts reported that special-interest groups participate in discussing the instructional program at every board meeting or at every second or third board meeting. In general, respondents from districts with goal-oriented objectives were most likely to report that their districts are actively involved in monitoring, evaluating, and improving the school program. This finding seems to indicate that school boards which are most inclined to establish specific goals for the district are also most inclined to ensure that those goals are achieved.

#### Formal versus informal assessments

In general, when school boards want to find out about the educational needs in their districts, they rely upon reports from administrators and special committees and informal conversations with community members, according to respondents. Ten percent of the responding districts said they conducted formal needs assessments of the community; 5 percent of the respondents said the results of formal needs assessments provide their boards with the most information on educational needs. In contrast, more than one-third of the respondents reported that they acquire information about their districts' educational needs from casual talks with community members at social events not affiliated with the work of the school system. These data support the view that informal channels of communication can provide useful information. Diagram A depicts how board members receive most of their information concerning community educational needs.

**DIAGRAM A**

**Sources from which School Boards Receive  
Information about Educational Needs**



(Percentages total more than 100 percent because respondents were asked to check the two ways in which they receive the most information.)

### **Public hearings**

Another way in which school boards can promote community involvement is to hold meaningful public hearings. Public hearings about some aspect of the instructional program (e.g., evaluations, policy development) were conducted in the 1980-81 school year in more than half of the urban (57 percent) and suburban (54 percent) districts represented by respondents to the survey. Approximately one-third of the respondents from rural and small town areas said they had held public hearings about the instructional program in the past year.

### **Determining which needs the school system will address**

#### **Definition of "balanced instructional program"**

A clear, organized approach to a sound educational program starts with a goal-oriented, written definition of the district's perception of what constitutes a well-balanced instructional program. By having something concrete to

which to refer—such as a written statement of specific goals—the superintendent, the administrative staff, and the teachers in the district will find it easier to know what is expected of them, what their task-oriented aspirations should be, and on what criteria their successes and failures will be evaluated. A written statement of goals is also a great advantage to school boards when it is time to evaluate the instructional program. Comparisons between "what is" and "what should be" are easier when consensus on "what should be" has already been reached.

Respondents to the NSBA survey indicated that the number of districts with written statements of goals and the number of districts without such statements are almost equal: 43 percent of the respondents said their districts do have goal-oriented definitions of a well-balanced curriculum while 47 percent of the respondents said that their districts do not have such concrete definitions. Districts located in rural areas and small town districts are slightly less likely to have written statements of goals than are districts in suburban or urban areas.

## State mandates

A well-balanced curriculum in a given district must be based not only on community needs and wants but also on mandates and directives from the state board of education. If both local and state suggestions are not incorporated, a school system will surely be found lacking in one area or another. How good an understanding do board members have of state-mandated requirements for their districts' instructional programs? When asked this question, the majority of respondents (77 percent) said they believe their boards have a good or excellent understanding of the mandates. A profile of districts with the clearest understanding of state-mandated requirements include districts in suburban areas with student enrollments over 2,500, districts with increasing student enrollments, and districts with goal-oriented, written definitions of a balanced instructional program. Boards expressed confidence about their knowledge of state mandates. The majority of respondents (85 percent) said that, in the past year, their boards did not seek counsel on how to comply with government-mandated requirements of their instructional programs.

## Instructional concerns

With which issues are school boards most concerned? Respondents to the survey were presented a list of 10 topics to rank in order of importance to their districts during the 1980-81 school year (see Table 1). The topic of most concern to the most districts, according to respondents, is career education, followed closely by education for handicapped students and education for gifted and talented students. The topics of least concern to responding board members at the time of the survey were global education, adult education, and bilingual education.

The rank-ordering of concerns, together with responses that show districts want information on meeting government mandates while still meeting local needs, indicates that school boards are trying to balance between what the local communities want with what the state and federal legislatures require. Urban and rural

districts, according to the survey results, desire the most information.

The choice of "career education" as the number one instructional concern of school boards indicates that boards are more interested in providing students with a "back to basics" education than with courses in what might be considered "frill" areas. The prevailing opinion among students is similar: they want an education that will provide them with the knowledge and, perhaps even more significantly, the skills that will lead to well-paying jobs.<sup>17</sup> The projected cutbacks in federal funding of certain education programs have sparked boards to re-evaluate and reconsider where their priorities should lie when establishing the educational goals of the school system.

**TABLE 1:**  
**Instructional Concerns of School Boards**  
(in rank order)

1. Career education
2. Education for handicapped students
3. Education for gifted and talented students
4. Drug education
5. Citizenship education
6. Energy education
7. Sex education
8. Global education
9. Adult education
10. Bilingual education

## Establishing policies

Policies are written to help achieve educational objectives after the board has reached agreement on what constitutes a balanced curriculum in the district. As part of the NSBA survey, board members were asked whether their districts had policies on a variety of activities that relate to the development of the instructional program. Almost all boards reported having policies on graduation requirements (94 percent) and evaluation of teachers (89 percent). In contrast, few boards reported having policies on board member visits to classrooms to observe

students (21 percent) and pre-employment competency tests for teachers (8 percent). (Further information regarding policies appears in subsequent portions of this report.) Presented in Table 2 are the percentages of respondents who reported having policies that relate directly to the instructional program in their districts.

### Textbook selection

Policies concerning selection of textbooks can be found in 75 percent of the districts represented by respondents. The policies usually deal with selecting, reviewing, and authorizing the use of textbooks in the public schools. Virtually all school boards retain some control over the selection of textbooks used in the district's schools. Sixty percent of the respondents said their districts have complete autonomy over the selection of textbooks, and an additional 36 percent said they select the textbooks to be used from a list of books approved by the state department of education.

If a list of available textbooks is not provided by the state board of education, it is usually the district administrators who find out which text-

books are still being printed and who usually review the books. School boards retain final authority over the actual use of books in the classrooms. Overall, responding board members said that they are never involved in finding textbooks to review (77 percent), they are never (42 percent) or sometimes (39 percent) involved in reviewing textbooks, but they are often involved in approving the use of textbooks (57 percent). Nearly one-fourth of the respondents, however, reported that they are never required to give final approval before textbooks can be used by the district's students. Suburban districts are more involved than rural, small town, or urban districts in all aspects of the textbook-selection process.

Board members, for the most part, are satisfied with the amount of involvement they have in the textbook-selection process. Three-fourths of the respondents do not want to become any more involved than they are now in selecting textbooks to review or authorizing textbooks to be used. More than half of the respondents are also pleased with their involvement in reviewing textbooks, but 37 percent expressed a desire to become more involved in this stage. Very few

**TABLE 2:**  
**Policies Relating to the Instructional Program**

|                                                    | Districts that<br>have the Policy |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
|                                                    | %                                 |
| Graduation requirements                            | 94                                |
| Evaluation of teachers                             | 89                                |
| Observation of teachers by supervisors             | 81                                |
| Selection of textbooks                             | 75                                |
| Curricular in-service training for teachers        | 73                                |
| Promotion requirements                             | 72                                |
| Evaluation of the instructional program            | 65                                |
| Review of policies about instruction               | 53                                |
| Board's role in the instructional program          | 53                                |
| Selection of supplementary materials               | 48                                |
| Collection of follow-up data on graduates          | 33                                |
| Reviewing course syllabuses                        | 32                                |
| Board member visits to classes to observe students | 21                                |
| Pre-employment competency tests for teachers       | 8                                 |

board members said they wanted their involvement to decrease in any phase of textbook selection.

Special committees on textbook selection are uncommon in approximately 75 percent of the districts represented in the survey. In those districts that do have committees on textbook selection, the average amount of time each committee devoted to its work in the 1980-81 school year was 17 hours. Special committees on textbook selection in urban districts, however, spent an average of 38 hours deliberating which textbooks should be used in the schools.

In general, board members believe they have as much information as they need to fulfill their responsibilities in the textbook-selection process. Nearly 83 percent of the respondents reported that their boards did not hire a consultant to review instructional materials within the past year, and the majority of respondents indicated that information on textbook selection was not of prime importance in their districts.

## **Becoming informed**

### **Requesting reports from administrators**

According to current writers, one way for boards to keep abreast of what is happening in their districts is to request reports from the superintendent and the administrative staff. Reports of current instructional activities are a means by which boards can monitor whether and how well the district's policies are being followed.

Board members, by and large, do receive most of their information about their district's instructional program from reports prepared by the administrative staff. The majority of respondents—89 percent—indicated that one of the two most frequently used resources for finding out about their community's educational needs are administrative reports.

### **Time spent at board meetings**

Sometimes reports from administrators are delivered verbally at board meetings. A study

conducted in 1968 found that school board members say a formal presentation fifteen minutes or longer involving one or more staff members is the most effective method of curricular communication at board meetings.<sup>18</sup> Short, informal reports by the superintendent, administrative staff members, principals, or teachers were considered to be effective, but not quite as effective as formal presentations. The least effective means of communicating about the district's instructional program at board meetings, according to respondents in the 1968 study, is a written report. Nonetheless, formal presentations were the least frequently used method of curricular communication while written reports were the second most frequently used method. It seems that in 1968 school boards did not spend a great deal of time at board meetings discussing the instructional program.

The amount of board-meeting time school board members are willing to devote to instructional-program issues is gradually increasing. A survey of 1979 NSBA Task-Force members found that the amount of time boards spent discussing curriculum issues increased from 1977 to 1979.<sup>19</sup> Nearly two-thirds of the respondents to the 1981 NSBA survey indicated they would like to devote still more time at board meetings to discussing the instructional program. Because schools face abounding problems of declining student enrollments and diminishing school budgets, the trend of discussing at board meetings how to provide the best possible education for the most students at the best cost is likely to continue.

### **Instructional topics discussed at meetings**

Respondents to the 1981 survey reported that student achievement on district standardized tests was the curricular topic that was discussed in the most depth at board meetings in the 1980-81 school year. In Table 3 are presented the topics listed in the questionnaire and the percentages of respondents who indicated that those topics were discussed in depth at board meetings.

**TABLE 3:**  
**Topics Relating to the Instructional Program**  
**Discussed in Depth at Board Meetings**

|                                                                 | School Boards Who<br>Discussed the Topic<br>% |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Achievement on district standardized tests                      | 76                                            |
| Comparisons of test scores with scores<br>in other districts    | 65                                            |
| Title I evaluation of district                                  | 59                                            |
| National decline in scores on standardized tests                | 54                                            |
| National decline in scores on college-entrance exams            | 41                                            |
| Information about progress of the district's<br>former students | 36                                            |
| I.Q. scores of students in the district                         | 33                                            |
| Public opinion polls of the community                           | 31                                            |
| Gallup Poll of public attitudes toward education                | 15                                            |
| National Assessment of Educational Progress<br>(NAEP) data      | 10                                            |

#### **In-service training for board members**

While board members can receive a great deal of valuable information from administrative reports, writers in the field of education concur that in-service training for board members is also a valuable means of gathering information about instructional programs, resources, and techniques. In-service training has the potential for providing school board members with the skills for interpreting and evaluating reports from the superintendent and the administrative staff. Furthermore, in-service training also may afford board members the opportunity to share ideas and opinions with board members from other districts, thus expanding the base of knowledge board members in a given district have about alternative methods of developing and monitoring the instructional program.

In general, board members in rural and small town areas attended more workshops during the 1980-81 school year on the process of develop-

ing or evaluating the instructional program than did board members in suburban or urban districts. On the average, board members responding to the NSBA survey attended one workshop related to the instructional program in the 1980-81 school year. Nearly one-fourth of the respondents, however, said they had not attended any such workshops in the past year.

In-service training for board members does not seem to be a major budgetary priority, according to respondents. The data show that during the 1980-81 school year, only 14 percent of the school boards represented in the survey allocated a larger percentage of their budgets to provide in-service training for board members on any process involved in developing and evaluating the instructional program. Rural districts and districts with goal-oriented definitions of a balanced curriculum were more likely than other kinds of districts to devote more money to in-service training for board members.

## **Evaluating teachers and teacher applicants**

### **In-service training for teachers**

School boards are more inclined to fund attendance for teachers at in-service workshops relating to the instructional program. During the 1980-81 school year, slightly more than half of the school boards represented in the survey increased the amount of money available for teacher in-service training. Nearly three-fourths of the respondents stated that their boards have a written policy on curricular in-service training for teachers.

### **Teacher evaluation**

Evaluation of teachers is a major concern of many districts represented in the survey. Respondents ranked "teacher evaluation" as the topic on which they would like the most information. Although 89 percent of the represented districts have a policy on teacher evaluation, it seems that school boards have a desire to review and, perhaps, revise the policies. The move to conduct reliable and valid teacher evaluations may be a result of declining national test scores and the realization that schools may not be providing the best education their students need to function in the near and distant futures.

Much as teacher evaluation is a concern to school boards today, 75 percent of the respondents to the survey said their school boards do not have a special committee set up to concentrate on teacher evaluations. Respondents from rural and small town areas were the most likely to say their boards had special committees to evaluate teachers. In terms of how much time these committees spent on their tasks, however, urban districts came out on top. Special committees on teacher evaluation in urban districts spent an average of 23 hours during the 1980-81 school year deliberating teacher-evaluation issues while nationally the average length of time spent on such matters was 17 hours.

One possible reason for the current strong interest in teacher evaluation may be that many

districts do not carefully screen applicants for teaching positions before hiring them and discover later that some of those teachers are not performing quite the way the district had wanted or expected. Only 8 percent of the respondents said that their districts have a written policy concerning pre-employment competency tests for teachers. More than half of the respondents (56 percent) reported that their districts do not have policies concerning either competency tests or minimum competency levels for teachers.

## **Evaluating and altering the instructional program**

Teacher evaluations are only one part of the overall evaluation of a district's instructional program. Reviewing syllabuses and collecting follow-up data on the district's graduates are other aspects of evaluation. Approximately one-third of the respondents said that their boards have formal policies on reviewing course syllabuses and following up on graduates of the district's public schools. At board meetings during the 1980-81 school year, information about former students was discussed in depth by 36 percent of the school boards represented in the survey. Districts with decreasing or stable enrollments were most likely to discuss former students.

### **Classroom observations**

In addition to evaluating teachers, reviewing syllabuses, and following up on graduates, board members can gain firsthand knowledge of the way the instructional program is working in the district by visiting classrooms to observe how a particular subject is taught and how students are reacting to it. Few respondents (21 percent) indicated that their boards have official policy statements concerning board-member visitations to classrooms. Even without written policies, some board members prefer to visit school sites to observe classes in action. During the 1980-81 school year, respondents visited classrooms an average of three times. Respondents from urban school districts visited classrooms an average of five times. Although

they do not visit often, respondents seem to recognize the value of on-site visits; 60 percent said they believe the number of visits to classrooms made by members of their boards should increase. An additional 33 percent said the number of visits should remain the same.

Several explanations could account for board members' infrequent visits to classrooms. A significant factor may be time. Because many board members have full-time jobs unrelated to the school system, it may be difficult for them to take time off from a paying job to visit classes during regular working hours. Another reason may be that board members believe observations by teacher supervisors and administrators are more accurate and valuable because those people have more experience and expertise in evaluating instructional programs. Regardless of how often board members visit classrooms, personal observations are almost always useful in fulfilling board responsibilities.

### Instructional-program evaluations

Approximately two-thirds of the respondents are from districts that have policies on evaluating the instructional program. In the majority of cases (59 percent), evaluations of the instructional program are conducted through both formal and informal methods. That is, reports of test results, studies conducted by staff members or consultants, personal observations, conversations with community members and teaching personnel, and subjective judgments of the staff are all used to assess how closely the actual instructional program approximates the ideal instructional program for a particular district. Urban districts are most likely to use mainly formal methods of evaluation whereas rural districts are most likely to rely on mainly informal assessment techniques. Five percent of the respondents said their districts do not evaluate their instructional programs. Presented in Table 4 are the breakdowns of formal versus informal evaluations in rural, small town, suburban, and urban districts.

**TABLE 4:  
Methods of Evaluating the Instructional Program**

|                                        |                                                                                                                  | Rural<br>% | Small Town<br>% | Suburban<br>% | Urban<br>% |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|-----------------|---------------|------------|
| Formal                                 | (e.g., reports of test results, studies conducted by staff or others, expert testimony of consultants)           | 7          | 9               | 17            | 26         |
| Informal                               | (e.g., personal observations; comments from constituents, students, and teachers; subjective judgments of staff) | 30         | 22              | 17            | 13         |
| Formal and informal                    |                                                                                                                  | 56         | 62              | 60            | 53         |
| Instructional program is not evaluated |                                                                                                                  | 6          | 5               | 4             | 4          |

Although respondents indicated that receiving information on instructional-program evaluations is a priority, few districts represented in the survey (15 percent) hired a consultant during the 1980-81 school year to evaluate professionally the district's instructional program. This finding may indicate that school boards would like to conduct more reliable evaluations, but are not willing to spend the extra money at this time to pay someone outside the school system to do that.

As further evidence of school boards' interest in evaluation, the survey also found that most special committees concerned with instructional programs are established to evaluate instructional programs. Slightly more than one-fourth of the respondents represent districts that have special committees on program evaluation. These committees, in general, spent an average of 24 hours on their work during the 1980-81 school year. Committees on program evaluation in rural areas alone, however, devoted an average of 33 hours to their work. Special committees in districts with decreasing enrollments spent more time reviewing course syllabuses than evaluating the overall effectiveness of the instructional program.

Do school board members feel strongly enough about the importance of developing and evaluating instructional programs to devote more time and money to those areas? "Yes" is the answer more than half of the respondents gave when asked that question in the survey.

Fifty percent of the respondents said they believe their districts should spend more money on developing and evaluating the instructional program; 47 percent said the amount of money they spend should remain the same. Similarly, 61 percent of the respondents said their districts should allocate more time at board meetings to discuss the instructional program; 38 percent said the amount of time now spent discussing the instructional program at board meetings is adequate.

### **Informing the public**

"Frequent and open exchanges of information and opinions will mutually benefit school board members and their constituents."<sup>20</sup> As school boards structure, evaluate, and revise instructional programs to provide the best possible education for their students, boards should inform their publics about what has been, is, and will be done. Not only does such communication minimize misunderstandings and clear the path to the achievement of shared goals, but also it allows the public to appreciate more fully the work and dedication of its elected education officials. School boards may very well be conducting self-designed or informal public relations efforts to keep their communities informed, but according to survey respondents, only 11 percent of the represented districts hired a consultant during the 1980-81 school year to establish a formal public relations effort to tell the community what is happening within and to the instructional program.

## Summary

A comparison between what writers in the field of education suggest school boards should be doing and what school boards are actually doing or attempting to do shows that, basically, all parties are thinking along the same lines. Current education literature stresses that school boards need to take a greater responsibility for the instructional program than they have taken in past years. School board members, according to the NSBA survey, agree: school boards should become more actively involved in developing, evaluating, and revising the instructional program.

Problems arise when school boards try to balance what, in theory, should be with what, in practice, can be. Respondents to the survey indicated that they believe boards should spend more time and money on issues concerning the instructional program, but additional hours and funds are not readily available. For example, few boards hired consultants during the 1980-81 school year to provide counsel and skills on the various facets of the instructional program. It might be assumed that consultants were not employed to assist in instructional matters because boards felt money was needed for other pressing concerns. Moreover, because school board members are volunteers who often have full-time jobs and families, they may not have the time to carry out all the tasks and activities they might otherwise be inclined to do.

The results of the survey indicate that school boards are trying to comply with state and federal mandates while, at the same time, conform to the needs and desires of members of the local community. As school budgets are cut and funds diminish, this balance may prove to be difficult to achieve.

For the most part, school boards learn about and influence the instructional program by requesting written reports from administrators, speaking informally with members of the community, approving textbooks, setting policies for graduation requirements and teacher evaluations, and providing in-service training for teachers. Some areas in which school boards, in general, could increase their activities are visiting classrooms, setting minimum competency standards for teachers, following up on graduates of the public schools, and devoting more board-meeting time to discussions of what is actually happening and should be happening in the district schools.

Perhaps as boards continue to reorganize their priorities and come to terms with the problems inherent in current school programs, they will begin to allocate more money and exercise greater leadership in developing, evaluating, and revising the instructional program.

## Appendix A: What is Your Curriculum I.Q.?

By Charles E. Lapp

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No one will deny that by far your most important duty as a school board member is to guarantee the best possible education for students in your community. Yet when it comes to the development of curriculum—the instructional programs on which your students' education is based—many board members admit a woeful lack of outstanding of the board's responsibilities.

The simple quiz that follows is designed to help board members strengthen their comprehension of the board's role in curriculum planning. Just answer Definitely Yes; Yes, for the most part; No, I don't think so; or Definitely No to each of those 13 questions (after you answer, read on to find your "Curriculum I.Q."):

1. I have in my personal possession the written curriculum for all grade levels and subject areas taught in my school system. I have looked through this document and am acquainted with its contents.

2. I have been exposed to and am reasonably familiar with state and federal guidelines as they pertain to public school instruction.

3. I have a clear notion of what members of my community want taught in their classrooms. I'm also aware of their specific likes and dislikes.

4. The superintendent and his staff keep our community informed about what is being taught in our schools.

5. As a board member, I have the opportunity to become involved in planning for curriculum change.

6. Every group that is likely to be affected by a curriculum change has the opportunity to air its opinions well in advance of any change.

7. Our board provides enough money and personnel for evaluation, planning, and supervision of the existing curriculum.

8. I have evidence (in the form of test results, graduation statistics, and so on) of what our schools are accomplishing in terms of student achievement.

9. I am familiar with the school system's standard method of systematically studying and reviewing what is taught in our schools.

10. Our curriculum is based on accepted educational principles as well as on the community's values and needs.

11. Our board uses its regular meetings as a forum for discussing curriculum matters and instructional programs with the superintendent and his staff.

12. I am careful to study curriculum changes proposed by special-interest or pressure groups.

13. I am familiar with our system's process for studying proposed curriculum changes.

Add up your "Curriculum I.Q." score this way: Give yourself three points for every Definitely Yes answer; two points for every Yes, for the most part; one point for every No, I don't think so; and zero points for every Definitely No.

A perfect score of 39—Definitely Yes answers to all 13 questions—indicates that you and your board already have done everything possible to guarantee board leadership in curriculum planning. A 39 score also means you have done your part to keep informed about the board's excel-

lent curriculum policies. Scores of between 38 and 30 indicate one (or both) of two things: (1) the board understands its curriculum priorities, but could stand to study the accompanying list of its responsibilities; (2) you have failed to do your homework on instructional programming. Only you can tell whether the 38 to 30 score indicates lapses by you or by the board.

Scores lower than 30 indicate that immediate remediation by you and the board is necessary.

Start looking into the board's curriculum policies and making recommendations where changes seem necessary. (You might even want to use this quiz to convince other board members of the need for review.)

Only when you can answer Definitely Yes to each of the questions listed can you say your "Curriculum I.Q." is up to par.

## Appendix B: Model Board Policy for Comprehensive Curriculum Planning

*Reprinted with permission from California School Boards April/May 1980*

*The model policy was developed by the California Curriculum Alliance. Questions regarding the Alliance or the documents developed by it may be referred to Grant Thayer, Alliance chairperson, Office of the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools, 9300 East Imperial Highway, Downey, CA 90242, (213) 922-6316; or Lee Thompson, co-chairperson, Livermore Unified School District, 685 Las Positas Boulevard, Livermore, California 94550, (415) 447-9500, extension 221.*

Members of the Board of Education are chosen by the electorate and become the community's representatives to the educational decision-making process. They are charged with responsibility for creating policy and allocating resources to educate the district's children and youth. These tasks must be accomplished under the laws of the State of California and within the district's financial resources.

Board members continually seek to improve their knowledge of curriculum and learning principles through an organized program of reading; discussions with students, community members, and professional staff; attendance at conferences and workshops; and classroom visitations.

In concert with the district superintendent and the instructional staff, the Board identifies the community's desires and needs for its students and translates them into a statement of philosophy and a list of goals. The district's philosophy and goals become the touchstone of the educational program.

The Board, being aware that specific educational techniques are the responsibility of a well-trained professional staff, sees its major responsibilities as making provisions for instruc-

tional leadership, equipment, and materials of instruction, and taking such other facilitating actions as may be required and can be afforded to meet the needs of the students and, thus, to achieve the goals of the community.

It is a professional staff responsibility to consolidate curriculum plans generated at site council, local school, and district levels and to coordinate the efforts being made at these and other levels with county, state, and federal legislative efforts to effect educational change. As part of this responsibility, the professional staff establishes procedures for gathering data concerning appropriateness of the existing curriculum and effectiveness of the existing program. These data are reviewed periodically by the Board and staff as they evaluate district programs and monitor student progress toward the achievement of district goals.

The Board and superintendent are responsible for facilitating the development of general guidelines for the curriculum planning process. In addition to their use by the professional staff, these guidelines are tools for the Board and community to use in reviewing individual programs as the programs progress from conception to planning, implementation, evaluation, and revision. The following elements are included in the curriculum planning guidelines:

1. The district establishes a calendar covering a six-year period for the evaluation and revision of curriculum for all subject matter areas. The calendar coordinates the State Framework development and textbook adoption guidelines.

The calendar consists of

- District philosophy and goals review
- Needs assessment and curriculum review, utilizing the district's philosophy (goals and objectives)
- Development of plans to meet identified needs
- Adoption and implementation of the resulting programs
- Evaluation of the program's effectiveness

The process is continuous and cyclic. Over a period of years, all subject areas go through the cycle. This allows for evolution and change in curriculum to meet the emerging needs of students and society.

2. When adopting the budget each year, the Board considers the district's instructional program needs and provides necessary funds for curriculum planning, program implementation, evaluation, and staff development. Adequate provision for released time is also a part of the budget consideration.

3. All persons affected by curriculum design are in some way represented in the planning process. Teachers, administrators, students, and parents normally participate in the process. Consultants and subject matter specialists participate as needed.

4. Articulation between instructional levels is part of the ongoing planning process.

5. Knowledge of California Education Code sections is essential to ensure compliance with

mandated program requirements and to ensure that parameters for options are understood.

6. The Board is aware that consideration of how children learn is an essential element in all curriculum planning. The Board encourages and provides assistance to the professional staff in developing a statement of principles about how children learn. These principles become an integral part of the district's curriculum planning process.

7. An appropriate combination and balance needs to be maintained in the instructional methods, the language processes, and the content of the total educational program.

A balance of content in the student's total educational program includes courses in the social sciences and humanities, in mathematics and science, and in the practical and fine arts.

8. A balance of instructional methods is a part of all classroom experiences, kindergarten through grade twelve. These methods include individual work/study, small group interaction, and whole class experiences. The exclusive use of one instructional method is considered educationally unsound.

A balance of language processes is a part of classroom instruction in all areas. Speaking, listening, reading, writing, seeing, and touching are processes used in all classrooms. Research confirms that nonverbal as well as verbal processes sharpen and enrich reading and writing skills.

9. Assessment of staff development needs and establishment of provisions for meeting such needs are a part of the planning process.

## Appendix C: The School Board and the Instructional Program

A great deal has been written recently about what local school boards could -- and should -- be doing to monitor and improve their districts' instructional programs. Little information, however, has been collected on what board members are actually doing. That is, we do not know, on a national basis, how actively involved boards are in developing instructional programs, and, perhaps more significant, how much involvement board members think they should have or want to have in developing instructional programs.

To get a better understanding of the school board's real and desired roles in developing the instructional program, the National School Boards Association is conducting this random survey of board members across the country. The findings of this national study will be presented in an NSBA Research Report, scheduled for publication by mid-summer.

For the purposes of this survey, "instructional program" refers to an outline of the procedures, concerns, and subjects offered by a school over a period of time. When the term "developing the instructional program" is used, it refers to the processes involved in designing and redesigning the guidelines for instruction, including what will be taught, by whom, and in what sequence.

1. DOES YOUR SCHOOL BOARD HAVE A POLICY ON EACH OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES RELATING TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM? (PLEASE CIRCLE YOUR RESPONSE.)

|                                                             | 1   | 2  | 3          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|------------|
| A. Selection of textbooks                                   | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
| B. Selection of supplementary materials                     | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
| C. Promotion requirements                                   | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
| D. Graduation requirements                                  | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
| E. Evaluation of teachers                                   | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
| F. Observation of teachers by supervisors                   | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
| G. The board's role in developing the instructional program | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
| H. Board members visiting classrooms to observe students    | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
| I. Reviewing of course syllabuses                           | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
| J. Collection of follow-up data on the district's graduates | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
| K. Curricular in-service training for teachers              | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
| L. Evaluation of the instructional program                  | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
| M. Pre-employment competency tests for teachers             | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |
| N. Review of policies concerning the instructional program  | YES | NO | DON'T KNOW |

2. DOES YOUR BOARD HAVE A GOAL-ORIENTED, WRITTEN DEFINITION OF WHAT CONSTITUTES A "BALANCED INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM" IN YOUR DISTRICT?

<sup>1</sup> ☐ YES      <sup>2</sup> ☐ NO      <sup>3</sup> ☐ DON'T KNOW

3. RATE YOUR BOARD'S UNDERSTANDING OF STATE-MANDATED REQUIREMENTS OF YOUR DISTRICT'S INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM.

<sup>1</sup> ☐ Excellent      <sup>2</sup> ☐ Good      <sup>3</sup> ☐ Fair      <sup>4</sup> ☐ Poor

4. FROM WHICH TWO OF THE FOLLOWING SOURCES DO YOU RECEIVE THE MOST INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR DISTRICT'S EDUCATIONAL NEEDS? (CHECK TWO ONLY.)

- <sup>1</sup> ☐ Consultants are hired to conduct formal needs assessments of the community.
- <sup>2</sup> ☐ Board members casually talk with community members at social events not affiliated with the work of the school system.
- <sup>3</sup> ☐ Community groups are invited to address the board at scheduled meetings.
- <sup>4</sup> ☐ The board requests reports from the administrative staff.
- <sup>5</sup> ☐ Representatives of the board periodically visit classrooms to observe students.
- <sup>6</sup> ☐ Reports are presented by special board committees.

5. IN THE PAST YEAR, HAS YOUR BOARD HIRED A CONSULTANT TO...(PLEASE CIRCLE YOUR RESPONSE.)

- |                                                                                                            | 1   | 2  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|
| A. Conduct a needs assessment of the community?                                                            | YES | NO |
| B. Offer counsel on how to comply with the government-mandated requirements of the instructional program?  | YES | NO |
| C. Assist in reviewing instructional materials?                                                            | YES | NO |
| D. Review policies concerning the instructional program?                                                   | YES | NO |
| E. Evaluate the instructional program?                                                                     | YES | NO |
| F. Establish a public relations effort to inform the community about the district's instructional program? | YES | NO |

6. FOR EACH OF THE FOLLOWING TOPICS, INDICATE WHETHER IT HAS BEEN DISCUSSED IN-DEPTH AT ONE OF YOUR BOARD MEETINGS SINCE AUGUST 1980. (PLEASE CIRCLE YOUR RESPONSE.)

- |                                                                                      | 1   | 2  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|
| A. National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data                           | YES | NO |
| B. The national decline in scores on standardized tests                              | YES | NO |
| C. The national decline in scores on college-entrance exams                          | YES | NO |
| D. IQ scores of students in your district                                            | YES | NO |
| E. Information about the progress of your district's former students                 | YES | NO |
| F. Public opinion polls of your community                                            | YES | NO |
| G. Gallup Poll of Public Attitudes toward Education                                  | YES | NO |
| H. Title I evaluation in your district                                               | YES | NO |
| I. Achievement on district standardized tests                                        | YES | NO |
| J. Comparisons of test scores in your district with test scores in similar districts | YES | NO |

7. PLEASE RANK THE FOLLOWING TOPICS IN ORDER OF WHICH IS OF THE GREATEST CONCERN TO YOUR DISTRICT AT THIS TIME TO WHICH IS OF THE LEAST CONCERN TO YOUR DISTRICT AT THIS TIME. (1 = GREATEST CONCERN, 10 = LEAST CONCERN)

☐ Energy education  
☐ Sex education  
☐ Global education  
☐ Bilingual education  
☐ Citizenship education  
☐ Drug education  
☐ Career education  
☐ Adult education  
☐ Education for handicapped students  
☐ Education for gifted and talented students

8. IS THERE A SPECIAL COMMITTEE OF THE BOARD THAT CONCENTRATES ON...(PLEASE CIRCLE YOUR RESPONSE)

|                                                            | 1   | 2  |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-----|----|
| A. Textbook selection?                                     | YES | NO |
| B. Evaluation of the instructional program?                | YES | NO |
| C. Evaluation of teachers?                                 | YES | NO |
| D. Reviewing of course syllabuses?                         | YES | NO |
| E. Another aspect of developing the instructional program? | YES | NO |

(Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

9. IF THERE IS A BOARD COMMITTEE THAT CONCENTRATES ON THESE AREAS, APPROXIMATELY HOW MANY HOURS HAS IT DEVOTED TO ITS WORK SINCE AUGUST 1980?

|                                                           |       |       |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| A. Textbook selection                                     | _____ | hours |
| B. Evaluation of the instructional program                | _____ | hours |
| C. Evaluation of teachers                                 | _____ | hours |
| D. Reviewing of course syllabuses                         | _____ | hours |
| E. Another aspect of developing the instructional program | _____ | hours |

(Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

10. IN THE PAST YEAR HAS YOUR BOARD OR A BOARD COMMITTEE HELD PUBLIC HEARINGS ABOUT SOME ASPECT OF THE DISTRICT'S INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM (e.g., EVALUATIONS, POLICY DEVELOPMENT)?

<sup>1</sup> ☐ Yes      <sup>2</sup> ☐ No

11. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS MOST CLOSELY REFLECTS HOW YOUR DISTRICT'S INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM IS EVALUATED?

- <sup>1</sup> ☐ Mostly informal methods are used (e.g., personal observations; comments from constituents, teachers, and students; or the subjective judgment of the staff).  
<sup>2</sup> ☐ Mostly formal methods are used (e.g., reports of test results, studies conducted by staff or others, or expert testimony of consultants).  
<sup>3</sup> ☐ A combination of both informal and formal methods are used.  
<sup>4</sup> ☐ The instructional program is not evaluated.

12. PLEASE RANK THE FOLLOWING AREAS OF DEVELOPING THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM IN ORDER FROM THE ONE ON WHICH YOU WOULD LIKE THE MOST INFORMATION TO THE ONE ON WHICH YOU WOULD LIKE THE LEAST INFORMATION AT THIS TIME. (1=YOU'D LIKE THE MOST INFORMATION, 5=YOU'D LIKE THE LEAST INFORMATION) ALSO, NEXT TO EACH TOPIC, PLEASE INDICATE THROUGH WHICH MEANS YOU WOULD MOST LIKE TO RECEIVE THAT INFORMATION. (PLEASE CHECK ONLY ONE ONE MEANS FOR EACH TOPIC.)

|                                                                     | <u>Workshops</u>         | <u>Reports</u>           | <u>A-V Mater</u>         |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|                                                                     | <u>1</u>                 | <u>2</u>                 | <u>3</u>                 |
| ___ How to meet government mandates while still meeting local needs | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ___ Textbook selection                                              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ___ Instructional program evaluation                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ___ Writing policies concerning the instructional program           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ___ Teacher evaluation                                              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

- 13 WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS BEST DESCRIBES HOW TEXTBOOKS ARE CURRENTLY SELECTED IN YOUR DISTRICT?

- <sup>1</sup>☐ The local school district has complete autonomy over the selection of textbooks.
- <sup>2</sup>☐ The local school district selects textbooks from a list of books approved by the state.
- <sup>3</sup>☐ The local district selects textbooks for grades \_\_\_\_\_ while the state selects textbooks for grades \_\_\_\_\_.
- <sup>4</sup>☐ The state determines which textbooks will be used in the local district.

14. FOR EACH OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES CONCERNING TEXTBOOK SELECTION, CHECK WHETHER YOUR BOARD IS OFTEN, SOMETIMES, OR NEVER DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THAT PROCESS.

|                                   | <u>Board is<br/>Often<br/>Involved</u> | <u>Board is<br/>Sometimes<br/>Involved</u> | <u>Board is<br/>Never<br/>Involved</u> |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
|                                   | <u>1</u>                               | <u>2</u>                                   | <u>3</u>                               |
| A. Finding textbooks to review    | <input type="checkbox"/>               | <input type="checkbox"/>                   | <input type="checkbox"/>               |
| B. Reviewing textbooks            | <input type="checkbox"/>               | <input type="checkbox"/>                   | <input type="checkbox"/>               |
| C. Approving the use of textbooks | <input type="checkbox"/>               | <input type="checkbox"/>                   | <input type="checkbox"/>               |

15. FOR EACH OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES CONCERNING TEXTBOOK SELECTION, DO YOU THINK YOUR BOARD SHOULD INCREASE OR DECREASE ITS INVOLVEMENT, OR SHOULD INVOLVEMENT OF THE BOARD REMAIN AS IT IS NOW?

- A. Finding textbooks to review <sup>1</sup>☐ Increase <sup>2</sup>☐ Decrease <sup>3</sup>☐ Remain the same
- B. Reviewing textbooks <sup>1</sup>☐ Increase <sup>2</sup>☐ Decrease <sup>3</sup>☐ Remain the same
- C. Approving the use of textbooks <sup>1</sup>☐ Increase <sup>2</sup>☐ Decrease <sup>3</sup>☐ Remain the same

16. SO FAR, IN THE 1980-81 SCHOOL YEAR, HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU PERSONALLY VISITED CLASSROOMS IN YOUR DISTRICT WITH THE PURPOSE OF OBSERVING HOW A PARTICULAR SUBJECT IS BEING TAUGHT?

\_\_\_\_\_ times in the 1980-81 school year

17. IN YOUR OPINION, SHOULD MEMBERS OF YOUR BOARD VISIT CLASSROOMS TO OBSERVE STUDENTS MORE OFTEN OR LESS OFTEN, OR SHOULD THE NUMBER OF VISITS REMAIN AS THEY ARE NOW?

- ☐ Visit classrooms more often  
☐ Visit classrooms less often  
☐ Have the number of visits to classrooms remain the same

18. HOW OFTEN DO SPECIAL-INTEREST GROUPS (e.g., TEACHERS, STUDENTS, BUSINESSES) PARTICIPATE IN DISCUSSIONS ABOUT THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM AT BOARD MEETINGS?

- ☐ Often (Approximately every board meeting)  
☐ Sometimes (Approximately every second or third board meeting)  
☐ Rarely (Only two or three times per year)  
☐ Never

19. IN THE PAST YEAR, HAS YOUR BOARD ALLOCATED A LARGER PERCENTAGE OF ITS BUDGET TO IN-SERVICE TRAINING ON ANY PROCESS INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING OR EVALUATING THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM...

- |                   |                              |                             |
|-------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| For teachers      | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |
| For board members | <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> No |

20. HOW MANY WORKSHOPS HAVE YOU ATTENDED IN THE 1980-81 SCHOOL YEAR CONCERNING ANY PROCESS INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING OR EVALUATING INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS?

\_\_\_\_\_

21. DO YOU THINK YOUR DISTRICT SHOULD SPEND MORE OR LESS MONEY ON DEVELOPING AND EVALUATING THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM, OR SHOULD THE DISTRICT CONTINUE TO SPEND THE SAME AMOUNT OF MONEY THAT IT IS NOW SPENDING?

- ☐ More money  
☐ Less money  
☐ The amount of money spent should remain the same.

22. DO YOU THINK YOUR BOARD SHOULD SPEND MORE OR LESS TIME AT BOARD MEETINGS DISCUSSING THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM, OR SHOULD THE BOARD CONTINUE TO SPEND THE SAME AMOUNT OF TIME IT IS NOW SPENDING?

- ☐ More time  
☐ Less time  
☐ The amount of time spent should remain as it is now.

23. IN THE PAST DECADE, HAS YOUR BOARD IMPLEMENTED, REVIEWED, AND/OR REVISED THE MINIMUM COMPETENCY LEVELS FOR TEACHERS IN YOUR DISTRICTS? (CHECK AS MANY AS APPLY.)

<sup>1</sup>☐ Implemented

<sup>2</sup>☐ Reviewed

<sup>3</sup>☐ Revised

<sup>4</sup>☐ Our district does not have minimum competency levels for teachers.

<sup>5</sup>☐ Don't know

24. WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENT YOUR BOARD HAS MADE IN THE PAST YEAR IN TERMS OF DEVELOPING THE INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM?

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25. WHAT ASPECT OF YOUR DISTRICT'S INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO IMPROVE?

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26. IN WHAT KIND OF AREA IS YOUR DISTRICT PREDOMINANTLY LOCATED? (CHECK ONE ONLY.)

<sup>1</sup>☐ Rural

<sup>3</sup>☐ Suburban

<sup>2</sup>☐ Small town

<sup>4</sup>☐ Urban

27. HOW MANY PUPILS ARE ENROLLED IN YOUR DISTRICT?

<sup>1</sup>☐ 0 - 2,499

<sup>2</sup>☐ 2,500 - 9,999

<sup>3</sup>☐ 10,000 - 24,999

<sup>4</sup>☐ 25,000 or more

28. IS YOUR PUPIL ENROLLMENT GENERALLY INCREASING, DECREASING, OR STABLE?

<sup>1</sup>☐ Increasing (by what percentage? \_\_\_\_\_%)

<sup>2</sup>☐ Decreasing (by what percentage? \_\_\_\_\_%)

<sup>3</sup>☐ Stable

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Raymond E. Callahan, "The American Board of Education, 1789-1960," in Peter J. Cistone, ed., *Understanding School Boards* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1975), pp. 19-46.

<sup>2</sup> Elwood P. Cubberley, *Public School Administration* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1916), p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> *Report of the 1979-80 Task Forces on the School Board's Role in the Educational Program*. (Washington, D.C.: National School Boards Association, 1980).

<sup>4</sup> Fenwick W. English, "Your Board's Responsibility for Curriculum," *California School Boards* (April/May 1980), pp. 9-11.

<sup>5</sup> H. G. Rickover, "Why School Boards?", *Compact* (Spring 1978), pp. 8-9.

<sup>6</sup> Sheldon Baker, "Boards Must Be Involved in Curriculum," *California School Boards* (April/May 1980), pp. 5-7.

<sup>7</sup> *Report of the 1979-80 Task Forces on the School Board's Role in the Educational Program*, p. 18.

<sup>8</sup> Keith Goldhammer, *The School Board* (New York: Center for Applied Research in Education, Inc., 1964).

<sup>9</sup> Betty Tomblin and Leslie G. Wolfe, "The Board's Role as Curriculum Leader," *California School Boards* (September 1980), pp. 17-21.

<sup>10</sup> Fenwick W. English, *Improving Curriculum Management in the Schools* (Washington, D.C.: Council for Basic Education, 1980).

<sup>11</sup> Ronald S. Brandt, ed., *Partners: Parents and Schools* (Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1979), p. 70.

<sup>12</sup> Tomblin and Wolfe, p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* p. 18.

<sup>14</sup> Robert P. Hilldrup, "What Are You Doing About Your Illiterate Teachers?", *American School Board Journal* (April 1978), pp. 27-28.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> Tomblin and Wolfe, p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> Lawrence Barmann, "Will Liberal Education Survive?", *Christian Science Monitor* (May 27, 1981).

<sup>18</sup> Robert H. Lorentz, *Curricular Communications to School Boards* (Unpublished, Ed.D. dissertation, University of Southern California: 1968).

<sup>19</sup> *Survey of NSBA Task Force Members on Curriculum and Evaluation* (Unpublished, National School Boards Association: 1979).

<sup>20</sup> *School-Community Communication: School Board Members and Their Constituents* (Washington, D.C.: National School Boards Association, 1980-1).

## about NSBA . . .

The National School Boards Association, headquartered in Washington, D.C., is a not-for-profit organization whose primary mission is the general advancement of education through the unique American tradition of local citizen control. In this way, public elementary and secondary school policy is decided by local school board members, the vast majority of whom are elected and are directly accountable to the community. NSBA promotes the quality of education through services to state associations of local school boards and to local school boards; by serving as liaison with other education organizations and governmental authorities; and by increasing school board impact on federal education laws and regulations, and in court cases relating to education.

Active Members of NSBA are the 49 state associations of local school boards, the Hawaii State Board of Education, plus the boards of education in the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands. Nearly 1,350 local district school boards are NSBA Direct Affiliates.

NSBA represents the interests of school boards before Congress; provides development programs for school board members; provides school district management services, and offers to the school board movement a variety of other services including the annual convention.

The award-winning monthly magazine, *The American School Board Journal*, has been owned and published by NSBA since 1967. Publication of a new monthly magazine, *The Executive Educator*, began in January 1979.

Three NSBA council-type groups and two forum groups play a significant role in the National School Boards Association:

- The Council of Urban Boards of Education focuses on serving the needs of urban school boards.
- The Council of School Attorneys focuses on issues of school law.
- The Conference of School Board Negotiators serves those engaged in labor-management relations.
- The Forum of Federal Program Coordinators focuses on the administration of federally funded programs.
- The Large District Forum focuses on the unique needs of major non-urban school districts.

NSBA also maintains liaison with other groups, including the National Caucus of Black School Board Members and the National Caucus of Spanish-speaking Board Members.

Founded in 1940, NSBA made its first headquarters in Chicago and later moved its offices to suburban Evanston, Illinois, to accommodate the organization's continuing growth and scope of activities. In 1966, the Office of Federal Relations was established in Washington, D.C., and in 1976, the entire NSBA operations moved into new consolidated headquarters in Washington, D.C.

NSBA represents about 95,000 of the nation's school board members who, in turn, represent more than 97% of all public school children in the U.S.

NSBA policy is determined by a 132-member Delegate Assembly composed of active school board members from across the country. Translating this policy into action programs is a Board of Directors consisting of 20 members. The executive director administers NSBA programs, assisted by a 95-member staff.